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PRESS RELEASE
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WASHINGTON COUNTY EBOLA PREAPAREDNESS

Several County Emergency Response Agencies recently met to discuss Washington County's preparedness for Ebola. These agencies included the: Washington County Health Department, Emergency Management Agency, Washington County Hospital, Washington County Ambulance Service, and Washington County Sheriff Department. Topics discussed included: Screening procedures, personal protective equipment, Isolation and Quarantine protocols and enforcement, and potential security measures.

Many of you may have questions about Ebola, here is a brief history. Ebola, previously known as Ebola hemorrhagic fever, is a rare and deadly disease caused by infection with one of the Ebola virus strains. Ebola can cause disease in humans and nonhuman primates (monkeys, gorillas, and chimpanzees). There are five identified Ebola virus species, four of which are known to cause disease in humans.

Ebola viruses are found in several African countries. Ebola was first discovered in 1976 near the Ebola River in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since then, outbreaks have appeared sporadically in Africa. The current West African outbreak is the largest to date.

The natural reservoir host of Ebola virus remains unknown. However, on the basis of evidence and the nature of similar viruses, researchers believe that the virus is animal-borne and that bats are the most likely reservoir. Four of the five virus strains occur in an animal host native to Africa.

How likely is it that someone could become infected? There are only specific ways the virus is transmitted.

- **Touching the blood or body fluids or a person who is sick with or has died from Ebola.**
- **Touching contaminated objects, like needles.**
- **Touching infected animals, their blood or other body fluids, or their meat.**

REMEMBER, IT IS NOT AIRBORNE! There is a greater risk of contracting seasonal flu currently than contracting Ebola. Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. Serious outcomes of flu infection can result in hospitalization or death. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. Over a period of 30 years, between 1976 and 2006, estimates of flu-associated deaths in the United

States range from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting **vaccinated** each year.

Obviously with Ebola, the most significant difference is that we are dealing with a virus that currently has no vaccine and has a high case fatality rate....upwards of as high as 60% and in some instances, even higher. Meaning that of those who become infected, 60% or more will die.

At the meeting it was determined that the Washington County Health Department would be the lead agency in the surveillance and monitoring of any Ebola cases that would occur in Washington County. Questions may be directed to the department at 618-327-3644. Changes currently adopted by the Washington County Hospital include using a screening process of taking temperatures, and if elevated, asking questions regarding travel to western African countries and possible exposure to Ebola. Starting immediately when calling 911, screening questions will be asked before emergency services will be dispatched which were set in accordance with Illinois Department of Public Health Protocols.

For up to date information regarding Ebola in Washington County please check:

www.facebook.com/Washingtoncountyhealthdepartment or www.facebook.com/wcsheriff

More information about Ebola can be found at:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html>

Or by calling the:

- IDPH 24/7 hotline 1-800-889-3931